Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards

English Language Arts
Grades 9–12

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I

Observing the CCSS

Introduction

Not long ago I was driving a van filled with middle school soccer players and heard a voice from the back say, "I hate, I hate, I hate the MEAP." (The MEAP is Michigan's state test of math and English language arts [ELA].) I recognized the voice as that of a friend of my daughter, a good student, diligent in every way. Her class had just spent a month preparing for and then taking the MEAP, and she was feeling frustrated by the time spent and anxious about her performance.

That plaintive voice reminded me of concerns I've heard expressed about the latest chapter in the standards movement. The appearance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has aroused a variety of responses, some of them filled with anxiety and resentment. It's easy to get worried about issues of alignment, curricular shifts, and new forms of assessment. And it's frustrating, after carefully developing state ELA standards, to have to put them aside in favor of the CCSS. As one teacher put it, "The CCSS are less detailed than the standards they are replacing." Another lamented, "How are teachers supposed to have time to rewrite curriculum and realign lessons to CCSS now that the state has taken away our meeting times?"

Yet, responses to the CCSS have also been positive. Some teachers have said that the grade-specific standards are helpful because they provide useful details about learning goals for students. Others have noted that the CCSS can help them address the needs of transient students because teachers in different schools will be addressing similar learning goals. Still others have commented that the CCSS can provide a lens through which they can examine their own teaching practices. As one teacher put it, "Looking at the standards made me realize that I wasn't giving much attention to oral language." Another said, "I think they provide more opportunities for higher-order thinking and an authentic application of the content we teach."

Regardless of teacher responses, the CCSS are now part of the educational landscape. But these standards do not replace the principles that guide good teaching. Some things remain constant regardless of new mandates. One such principle is that teachers think first of their students, trying to understand their learning needs, developing effective ways to meet those needs, and continually affirming that the needs are being met. This book, like all four volumes in this series, is written with and by teachers who remain deeply committed to their students and their literacy learning. It is a book addressed to teachers like you. You may be an experienced teacher who has established ways of fostering literacy learning, or you may be a relative newcomer to the classroom who is looking for ideas and strategies, but that you are holding this book in your hands says that you put students at the center of your teaching.

No one knows as much about your students as you do. You understand the community that surrounds the school and helps to shape their life experiences. You have some information about their families and may even know their parents or guardians

personally. You can tell when they are having difficulty and when they are feeling successful. You have watched their body language, scanned their faces, listened to their voices, and read enough of their writing to have some ideas about what matters to them. Your knowledge about your students guides the instructional choices you make, and it shapes your response to any mandate, including the CCSS.

Your knowledge about students is probably connected to your knowledge of assessment. You know the importance of finding out what students have learned and what they still need to learn. You probably already know about the importance of authentic assessment, measures of learning that are connected with work students can be expected to do outside of class as well as in it. No doubt you use formative assessment, measures of learning that give students feedback rather than grades and help you know what they still need to learn. For example, you probably make sure that students respond to one another's written drafts as they develop a finished piece of writing. You may have individual conferences with student writers or offer marginal comments and suggestions on their drafts. Or perhaps you meet individually with students to hear them read aloud or tell you about what they have been reading. Whatever type of formative assessment you use, you probably use it to guide the decisions you make about teaching.

You may have read or heard about the Principles for Learning adopted by NCTE and other subject-matter associations, principles that position literacy at the heart of learning in all subjects, describe learning as social, affirm the value of learning about learning, urge the importance of assessing progress, emphasize new media, and see learning in a global context. These principles, like others articulated by NCTE, provide a North Star to guide instruction regardless of specific mandates, and you probably recognize that teaching based on such principles will foster student achievement, including achievement of the CCSS.

Because you are concerned about the learning of *all* of your students, you probably try to find ways to affirm the wide variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds that students bring into the classroom. No doubt you are interested in taking multiple approaches to reading, writing, speaking, and listening so that you can engage as many students as possible. Taking this stance convinces you that continual growth and innovation are essential to student achievement, especially when new standards are being introduced.

This book is designed to support you in meeting the challenges posed by the CCSS. It stands on the principle that standards do not mean standardization or a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. It assumes that inspirational teaching—teaching that engages students as critical problem solvers who embrace multiple ways of representing knowledge—can address standards most effectively. It celebrates new visions of innovation and the renewal of long-held visions that may have become buried in the midst of day-to-day obligations. It reinforces a focus on student learn-

ing by demonstrating ways of addressing these standards while also adhering to NCTE principles of effective teaching. It does this by, first, examining the CCSS to identify key features and address some of the most common questions they raise. The second section of this book moves into the classrooms of individual teachers, offering snapshots of instruction and showing how teachers developed their practices across time. These classroom snapshots demonstrate ways to address learning goals included in the CCSS while simultaneously adhering to principles of good teaching articulated by NCTE. In addition to narratives of teaching, this section includes charts that show, quickly, how principles and standards can be aligned. Finally, this section offers suggestions for professional development, both for individuals and for teachers who participate in communities of practice. Thanks to NCTE's online resources, you can join in a community of practice that extends across local and state boundaries, enabling you to share ideas and strategies with colleagues from many parts of the country. Embedded throughout this section are student work samples and many other artifacts, and NCTE's online resources include many more materials, from which you can draw and to which you can contribute. The final section of this book recognizes that effective change requires long-term planning as well as collaboration among colleagues, and it offers strategies and materials for planning units of study articulating grade-level expectations and mapping yearlong instruction.

Voices in the back of your mind, like the "I hate, I hate" voice in the back of my van, may continue to express frustrations and anxieties about the CCSS, but I am confident that the teachers you will meet in this book along with the ideas and strategies offered will reinforce your view of yourself as a professional educator charged with making decisions about strategies and curriculum to advance the learning of your students.

Anne Ruggles Gere
Series Editor

1

Demystifying the Common Core State Standards

I always approach the standards with my students in mind. I try to come up with a lesson that I think will be interesting for students. Then I'll sit down and say, which standards am I covering, which should I be covering that I'm not covering? I see part of my job as trying to get the kids that aren't interested to be interested. The whole point is to help the kids, that's the whole reason I do it. You have to continue to try new things, to be comfortable with what you're doing, and to try to reach as many kids as possible. That's the sole purpose of what I do. I'll do it any way I can.

—Steve Bodnar, *High School English Teacher*

Putting students at the center means thinking first about the kinds of learning experiences we want them to have, and since forty-plus states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (see http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards), many teachers will need to think about student learning in light of these standards. First, though, it will be helpful to understand where these standards came from and what they actually say.

The CCSS are part of a long-term movement toward greater accountability in education that stretches back to the early 1990s. In this line of thinking, accountability focuses on student achievement rather than, say, time spent in classrooms or materials used, and standards like the ones developed by states beginning in the 1990s have been used to indicate what students should achieve. Because of this emphasis, standards are often equated with educational transformation, as in "standards-based school reform." Proponents of standards-based reform have differing views of how standards should be used. Some assume that standards can lead to investments and curricular changes that will improve schools, while others see them as linked to testing that has little to do with allocating resources that will change schools for the better. This book operates from the assumption that ELA teachers can use standards as a lens through which they can examine and improve

the *what* and *how* of instruction, and the vignettes in Section II demonstrate how teachers are doing this.

The CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics, then, are the latest in a series of standards-based school reform initiatives. They were coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to prepare US students for both college and the workplace. This partnership of state governors and state school superintendents worked with Achieve Inc., an education reform organization founded in 1996 and based in Washington, DC, to develop CCSS. Funding for their work was provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles Steward Mott Foundation, and other private groups. Each state decided whether to adopt the CCSS, and the US Department of Education created an incentive by linking adoption of the CCSS to Race to the Top (RTT), requiring states that applied for RTT funds to adopt the CCSS. When the CCSS were released in June of 2010, more than forty states had already agreed to adopt them.

In the states that have formally adopted them, the CCSS will replace state standards. States may add 15 percent, which means that some elements of state standards could be preserved or new standards could be developed. The full text of the ELA standards, along with other explanatory materials, is available online at http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards.

Web 1.1
Throughout this volume, you will find links, reproducibles, interactive opportunities, and other online resources indicated by this icon. Go online to www.ncte.org/books/supp-students-9-12 to take advantage of these materials.

In September of 2010, two consortia of states, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Consortium, were funded—also with RTT monies—to develop assessments to accompany the CCSS, and these assessments are scheduled for implementation in 2014. At this point it is impossible to know precisely what the assessments will include, but preliminary documents indicate that formative assessment may play a role, that computers may be involved in both administration and scoring, and that some parts of the assessment, such as writing, may occur over multiple days.

Web 1.2
For updates on the development of CCSS assessments, check online.

I don't have time to read through the entire CCSS document, so can you give me a quick summary?

The ELA standards for grades 9–12 address four basic strands for ELA: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Although each is presented separately, the introduction to the CCSS in English Language Arts advocates for an integrated model of literacy in which all four dimensions are interwoven. In addition, the CCSS for grades 9–12 include standards for

history/social studies and science and technical subjects, which have reading and writing strands. Each strand has overarching Anchor Standards, which are translated into grade-specific standards. Figure 1.1 shows the structural relationship of the two.

The content of the two is similarly linked. For example, the 6–12 Anchor Standards for writing include the category "text types and purposes," and one of the Anchor Standards in this category reads, "write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence." One of the three 9–10 grade-specific standards that address this Anchor Standard includes the following:

- Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence
- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns

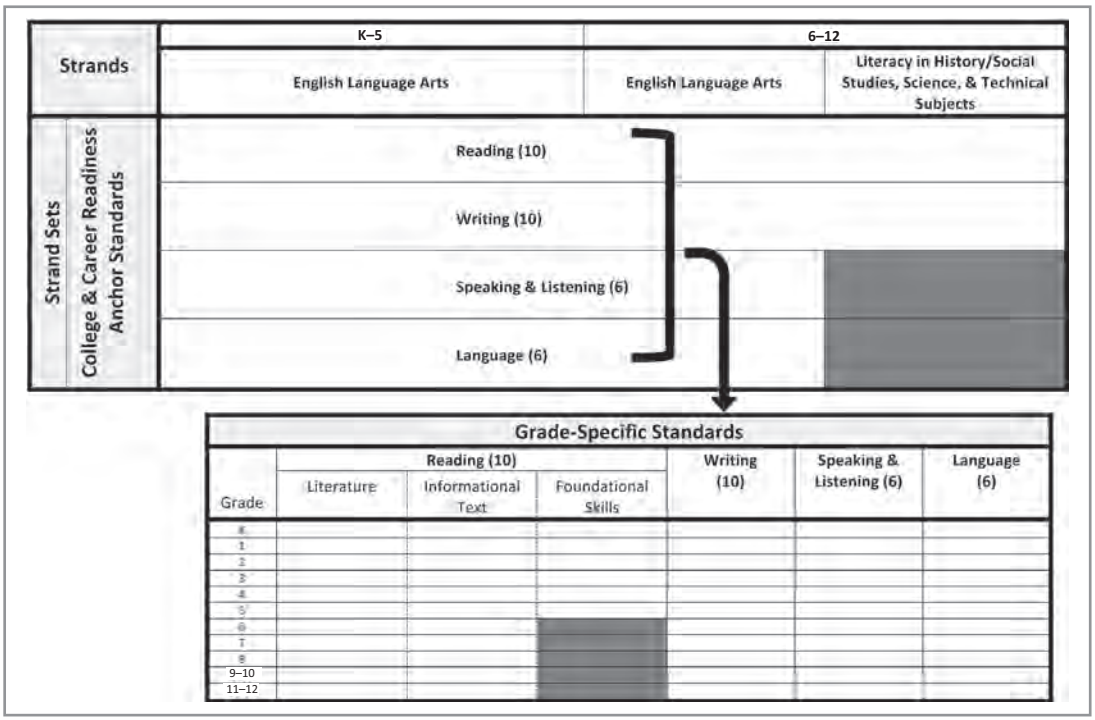


FIGURE 1.1: Structural relationships of the CCSS.

- Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented

To see examples of how teachers implement these and other grade-specific standards in their classrooms, turn to Section II of this book.

Needless to say, the introduction of the CCSS raises many questions for teachers and other instructional leaders. New mandates such as the CCSS can generate misconceptions and even myths, so it is important to look at the standards themselves. Because the implementation of the CCSS is an ongoing process, and because assessment is still under development, the online community associated with this book provides updates as well as a place to share ideas and experiences.

What is the relationship between the CCSS and the ones my state already developed?

There may well be some overlap between the CCSS and the standards developed by your state, particularly when you look at the more global goals of the Anchor Standards. Because it is possible to supplement the CCSS with up to 15 percent of state standards, some state standards may be preserved, but generally in states that have formally adopted the CCSS these new standards will replace existing state ones. The timing of implementing CCSS varies from one state to another, with some states shifting immediately and others doing it over a year or two.

There are some distinct differences between the CCSS and state standards:

- First, they are intended to be used by all states so that students across the United States will be expected to achieve similar goals, even though they may reach them by different routes.
- The interdisciplinary emphasis of including literacy standards for history, science, social studies, and technical subjects in grades 6–12 makes the CCSS different from most state ELA standards.
- The CCSS emphasize *rigor* and connect it with what is called *textual complexity*, a term that refers to levels of meaning, quantitative readability measures, and reader variables such as motivation and experience.

- The CCSS position students as increasingly independent learners, frequently describing tasks they should perform "without assistance."

Will the CCSS create a national curriculum?

No. CCSS focuses on results, on what students should know and be able to do rather than the specific means for achieving learning goals. As the introduction to the CCSS states on page 4, "the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers and states to determine how these goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. . . . Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards." In other words, the CCSS focus on what students should take away from schooling, but they stipulate that teachers should decide what to teach, how to teach it, and when and for how long to teach it. The CCSS acknowledge that teachers know what students bring to the classroom and how they learn best. Ongoing professional development, especially communities of learning with colleagues, will ensure that teachers have the content knowledge and expertise with instructional strategies to foster effective student learning.

I've heard that the CCSS includes lists of *exemplar* texts. Isn't that going to create a national curriculum?

The CCSS do include lists of texts on page 58 that illustrate what is called text complexity for each grade-level band. At the 9–10 level, for instance, the texts include both literary and informational texts. Among the literary selections are *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, "Ózymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, and *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara. Informational texts include "Speech to the Second Virginia Convention" by Patrick Henry, "Farewell Address" by George Washington, "State of the Union Address" by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King Jr., and "Hope, Despair and Memory" by Elie Wiesel.

However, these texts are simply offered as examples of topics and genres that teachers might include, not as specific texts to be adopted in all classrooms. Teachers need to select texts appropriate for their own students and for the context in which they work. As the vignettes in Section II show,

teachers can use a variety of texts to address the CCSS—Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Peter Kuper's *The Metamorphosis* are just two of them. The vignettes also show that these central or fulcrum texts work best when surrounded by contextual and texture texts that add perspective and meaning. For example, *The Great Gatsby* takes on new dimensions when read next to Nella Larsen's *Passing* and texts about the Eighteenth Amendment, which legalized Prohibition.

What more do we know about text complexity?

In Appendix A, page 4, the CCSS define text complexity as "level of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands, word frequency, sentence length [all in the context of] student knowledge, motivation and interest." This definition is expanded in a three-part model—qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations. The quantitative dimension refers to features, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and cohesion, that can be calculated by computers. The qualitative dimension refers to levels of meaning, structure, language conventions, and knowledge demands that cannot be measured well by machines but require careful attention from experienced readers/teachers. The reader and task considerations in Appendix A, page 4 include student motivation, knowledge, and experience as well as the purpose for reading, again, features that can be discerned by teachers "employing their professional judgment, experience and knowledge of their students and the subject."

It is worth noting that the CCSS acknowledge the limitations of this model of text complexity, particularly for literary forms such as poetry. Quantitative measures, for example, simply don't provide useful information about the relative complexity of a poem. Nor do they provide a useful measure of the complexity of much narrative fiction. As the CCSS observe in Appendix A, page 8, "some widely used quantitative measures, including the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test and the Lexile Framework for Reading, rate the Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Grapes of Wrath* as appropriate for grades 2–3." This means that teachers need to play a key role in deciding what constitutes textual complexity for their students.

What does *rigor* mean in this context?

Rigor is used in relation to text complexity. For example, in describing the reading standards for literature on pages 11 and 36, the CCSS include this

sentence: "Rigor is also infused through the requirement that students read increasingly complex texts through the grades." Rigor refers to the goal of helping students to continue developing their capacities as readers so that with each passing year they build upon skills and understandings developed during the previous year.

Teachers who immerse their students in rich textual environments, require increasing amounts of reading, and help students choose ever more challenging texts will address rigor as it is defined by the CCSS. This means keeping students at the center, motivating them to continually develop as writers and readers, and engaging them in literacy projects that are relevant to their lives. When students feel personal connections, they are much more willing to wrestle with complex topics/texts/questions. Student engagement, then, offers the best route to rigor.

Will implementing the CCSS mean eliminating literature in favor of "informational texts"?

It is true that the CCSS give significant attention to nonfiction, and on page 5, the introduction includes this statement: "Fulfilling the standards . . . requires much greater attention to a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction." According to the CCSS, the amount of nonfiction should be increased as students mature so that by the time they are seniors in high school, 70 percent of their reading should be nonfiction. But it is also true that CCSS describe literacy development as a responsibility to be shared by teachers across multiple disciplines, so this doesn't mean that 70 percent of reading in ELA classes should be nonfiction. The standards for history/social studies, science, and technological subjects demonstrate how responsibility for reading nonfiction should be spread across multiple courses.

To reinforce this point, on page 5, the CCSS introduction underscores the importance of teaching literature: "Because the ELA classroom must focus on literature (stories, drama, and poetry) as well as literary nonfiction, a great deal of informational reading . . . must take place in other classes." The CCSS advocate the combination of adding more nonfiction to the curriculum in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects along with including more nonfiction in ELA classes. This combination still leaves plenty of space for literature in ELA classes.

Do the CCSS advocate separating reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language from one another?

No. Although the standards are listed separately, the CCSS propose an integrated model of literacy. On page 4, the introduction explains, "Although the Standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected as reflected throughout this document. For example, Writing Standard 9 requires that students be able to write about what they read." This integrated approach fits well with NCTE principles and with the ELA standards developed by many states.

Formative evaluation is becoming increasingly important in my school. How do the CCSS address this?

Since the assessment portion of the CCSS is currently under development, it is impossible to know how it will address formative evaluation. The preliminary descriptions offered by the PARCC consortium use the phrase "through course components," which is described as "actionable data that teachers can use to plan and adjust instruction." This suggests that formative evaluation could well be part of the CCSS assessment.

This could be good news because formative evaluation is assessment *for* learning, not assessment *of* learning. When assessment helps teachers understand where students are having difficulty, as well as where they understand clearly, it is possible to adjust instruction to address the areas of difficulty. Research shows that formative assessment can be a powerful means of improving achievement, particularly for students who typically don't do well in school.

Web 1.5

Because assessments for the CCSS will be under development until 2014, it is worthwhile to monitor and perhaps contribute to their evolving shape. The websites for PARCC and Smarter Balance each include a list of the "governing states," and once you have determined which consortium your state is participating in, you can get in touch with the state representative(s) to learn more.

What do the CCSS say about English language learners and/or students with special needs?

In a section titled "What Is Not Covered by the Standards" on page 6, the CCSS explain, "It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define

the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs. At the same time, all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives." This section goes on to say, "Each grade will include students who are still acquiring English. For those students, it is possible to meet the standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening without displaying native-like control of conventions and vocabulary." Based on this, we might assume some flexibility in applying the CCSS to English language learners.

The statement on page 6 about students with special needs takes a similar position: "The Standards should also be read as allowing for the widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset and as permitting appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs." Clearly the CCSS provide only limited guidance for implementing the standards with English language learners and students with special needs.

Am I wrong to think that the CCSS will undercut teacher authority?

Probably. The CCSS make frequent reference to teachers' professional judgment and emphasize that teachers and other instructional leaders should be making many of the crucial decisions about student learning. The implementation of CCSS by individual states and/or school districts could have negative consequences for teachers, and it is impossible to know what will result from the as-yet-undeveloped assessment of the CCSS.

Still, in the best case, the CCSS can offer benefits to teachers. They can make it easier for teachers to deal with transient students by assuring that they have been working toward similar goals in their previous school. The CCSS can provide a lens through which teachers can examine their own practice to find areas that would benefit from more instructional attention or to introduce more balance into the curriculum. A number of teachers have reported that state standards had such effects, and it is reasonable to think that the CCSS might function similarly. Most of all, the CCSS can provide an occasion for teachers to consider what constitutes the most effective ELA teaching.

What is NCTE's stake in the CCSS?

Although it commented on drafts of the CCSS when they were under development, NCTE did not participate in creating these standards. As

an association most directly concerned with professional development, NCTE is invested in supporting teachers as they face the challenges posed by the CCSS. In addition, it is an association that values teacher voices, like the ones included in Section II of this volume. To that end, the Executive Committee of NCTE commissioned and invested in the four-volume set to which this book belongs. NCTE is also devoting online resources to providing materials that extend beyond this book and provide a space where communities of teachers can share ideas and strategies.

How should I begin to deal with the CCSS?

As the introduction to this book suggests, it makes sense to begin with students because teachers know more about their students than anyone else. As a first step you might make a list of goals for the students you are teaching now. Consider the skills, dispositions, motivations, habits, and abilities you would like them to develop. Your list probably encompasses every standard in the CCSS along with a good deal more. Keep your entire list in mind as you approach the CCSS, and start by thinking about what your students need to learn.

Looking at the learning needs of students in light of the CCSS can lead, in turn, to considering classroom practices and thinking about how various instructional strategies might be refined or adapted to foster student learning. Looking at classroom practices leads to questions about instructional materials and, ultimately, the curriculum. Woven through all of these is the continuing theme of professional growth and development because asking questions and reconsidering nearly always require changes that are best supported by professional development.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) may feel like yet another set of top-down, mandated standards. And integrating the CCSS into the curricula and teaching can, at times, generate feelings of pressure and conflict. But it is also possible to approach the CCSS from a different perspective as well—one that sees opportunities for bridging between good practice based on NCTE principles and policy and what the CCSS offer. The NCTE community, of which this book series is a part, is one space where you can start to build bridges and frame your interactions with the CCSS in ways that are empowering, highlight and encourage best practices in literacy learning, and sustain the incredible work that English teachers are already doing in classrooms. Rather than focusing on how the CCSS will subvert the instruction we are already doing, framing our approach to the standards instead around

observing, contextualizing, and building can help us to bridge the CCSS and established instructional practices based on NCTE principles, allowing the two to work in tandem.

First, one way to frame discussions about and approaches to the CCSS is to focus on detailed observation. Before we can become teachers who incorporate these standards in meaningful and pedagogically sound ways into our practices, we need to be learners who observe and take careful note of what exists in the document and what the standards are asking of students. We also need to develop observational lenses through which to see the standards that will keep students and their needs at the center of all instructional change. Learning about the CCSS through close observation may better equip us to advocate for our students' unique needs.

A second way to think about the standards is to use them as a frame for contextualizing. It is important to remember that, while we observe and take note of what exists in the CCSS document itself, we always need to keep specific school and classroom cultures and environments in mind, understanding how different teaching contexts can pose different challenges and opportunities. The teaching vignettes you will read in this section seek to display and honor a variety of school contexts, cultures, and teaching environments, but not all of the teachers in this volume approach planning with the CCSS in the same way, and their lessons don't look the same. A consideration of local context, then, must be coupled with detailed observation of the CCSS document itself.

Third, we can see the CCSS as a frame for building our instruction and classrooms and for meeting students where they are and keeping their needs at the center of lesson design and instruction. To build with the CCSS in mind, we need to begin to see them as more than boxes to check off on a list or forces mandated from above that are seeking to destroy our classrooms. Instead, building *from* and at times *with* the CCSS will involve developing knowledge about the document itself, examining and evaluating our current experiences in the classroom and the culture in which we teach, and relying on the communities around us for support and assistance.

This book, then, is framed around observing the CCSS closely, contextualizing these standards to address specific students in specific schools, and building instruction that integrates the CCSS with NCTE principles for teaching English language arts.

Observing

Detailed observation of the CCSS can begin with identifying where the standards may present shifts from previous state standards documents and identifying patterns in the language of the CCSS document. By looking across the document in this way, you can see some of the most salient shifts. Below, you will find a brief overview of student-focused shifts and instructional shifts that occur in the CCSS document, as well as references to specific CCSS document pages where you can seek greater specificity about these themes.

Student-Focused Shifts

- *Meaning-making*—The CCSS require that students will do more than just read texts for basic comprehension; instead, students will be expected to pull from multiple sources to synthesize diverse texts and ideas, consider multiple points of view, and read across texts. (See, for example, pages 8 and 40 of the CCSS document.)
- *Developing independence*—The ultimate goal of each standard is that all students will demonstrate the ability to enact key skills and strategies articulated in the CCSS on their own. To help students reach this goal, the CCSS spiral expectations across grade levels. Standards for the elementary grades, for example, include language about how students should enact the standard "with support." To clarify, this expectation does not diminish the need to scaffold instruction at all grade levels; rather, the goal is to move students toward independent enactment of standards. (See CCSS document, page 7. Note that while there are times when the language of independence is explicitly stated as on page 55, this expectation is also embedded in assumptions about all CCSS.)
- *Transfer of learning*—On page 7, the CCSS state that students will be required to respond to a variety of literacy demands within their content area courses—ELA *and* others—and to discuss with others how their ability to meet these demands will prepare them for the demands they will face in college and in their future careers.
- *College and career readiness*—Linked to transfer, on page 7, the CCSS expectations articulate a rationale for what college- and career-ready high school students will be able to do. There is little, if any, focus on rote memorization. Rather, the CCSS focus is on skills, strategies, and habits that will enable students to adapt to the rhetorical demands of their future learning and contributions.

Instructional Shifts

It is important to reiterate that the CCSS do not mandate *how* teachers should teach; this is even stated explicitly on page 6 in the document. Why a focus on instructional shifts? Clearly, just as the CCSS spell out what students will be expected to do, the CCSS may prompt shifts in our thinking about how best to help students meet these expectations, which will inevitably affect our teaching.

- *Spiraling instruction*—Unlike some state and district standards, the CCSS do not promote instructional coverage. Instead, the CCSS invite spiraled instruction. Students will be expected to enact particular standards repeatedly within grade-level content area courses *and* across grade levels. In part, this is evident when tracing the lineage of a particular standard to the grade level below and above. Parts of particular CCSS are repeated and built on in subsequent grades. The CCSS are therefore meant to build iteratively. On page 30 of the CCSS document there is a graphic representation of this spiraling idea with regard to language skills, but a similar graphic could just as well be created to illustrate the approach to the other ELA threads as well. For further discussion of spiraling instruction, see Section III of this volume.
- *Integration of ELA threads*—On pages 4 and 47, the CCSS encourage an "integrated model of literacy" whereby ELA threads (e.g., reading and writing) are woven throughout units of study.
- *Inclusion of nonfiction or informational texts*—On page 5, the CCSS set explicit expectations regarding the kinds of texts students read and write. By twelfth grade, 70 percent of the sum of students' reading, for example, is to be informational, nonfiction reading. But as we discuss further in Section III, the responsibility for this reading is shared by all content area teachers. Still, the inclusion of more informational text may present a shift for some.
- *Text complexity*—Page 57 of the CCSS document offers a descriptive graphic on text complexity. NCTE principles affirm the range of ways that strong ELA teachers introduce increasingly complex texts to student readers. These include but are not limited to student interest, genre, language, content, and ELA concepts foregrounded in instruction. For further discussion of text complexity, see Chapter 2 in Section II where Sarah Brown Wessling shares about how she approaches text complexity in relation to the CCSS.

II

Contextualizing

2 Everything's a Conversation: Reading Away Isolation

Meet Sarah Brown Wessling, Johnston High School

In the sections and chapters that follow, I will invite you into my classroom, along with the classrooms of other high school English language arts teachers whose experiences in planning and implementing instruction can help you to think about how you can contextualize and build using the CCSS, established NCTE principles, and the instructional practices you already use that work well.

My teaching began twelve years ago, eleven of which have been at Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa, where I have taught a range and variety of courses throughout my tenure. The suburban high school, currently comprised of 1,300 students in grades 10 through 12, has seen incredible growth in population over the past fifteen years, which has created a steady trajectory of adding teachers, managing ballooning class sizes, and ever-changing student populations. Each year, this community now welcomes more ELL (English language learner) students and those utilizing free and reduced-price lunch. While some courses at the high school are on a block schedule, all courses in the English department meet once a day for forty-four minutes. All but two course offerings (tenth-grade Integrated Language Arts and Advanced Placement Literature and Composition) are semester length. Students choose classes from a newly recon-

structed set of course offerings designed around fifteen thematic topics (e.g., Teen in the World, Power of Persuasion, Reading the Screen, or Culture Clash). Designed around themes, these courses each integrate various strands of literacy—reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening—and each position fiction, nonfiction, and informational texts in the context of unit construction. These course offerings are designed for differentiation within each class, so all kinds of learners are included in any given classroom of approximately twenty-three to twenty-eight students. In addition to my work at Johnston High School, I served as a national ambassador for education as the 2010 National Teacher of the Year.

When you walk into my classroom, you'll find a Jackson Pollock print on the wall. At the beginning of the school year it usually doesn't take too long for a student looking at it to say something like, "I could be famous too if all I did was take paint and splatter it all over a canvas." I wait in anticipation for this moment of provocation, when a student unknowingly invites a conversation about the difference between appearance and reality, the relationship between chaos and precision. I'm anxious to tell them about Pollock's immersion into process, his captivation with intentionality and his precision of practice that transcends into art. The work of Jackson Pollock reminds me that like quality instruction, what may appear chaotic is deliberate, precise, and carefully designed.

Contextualizing

The way we design instruction with local context and the CCSS in mind determines the kind of learning that will emerge on the canvas of our classrooms. What we emphasize, what we say, and what we spend our time engaged in will emerge in what and how our students learn. So, we are deliberate, knowing that what happens on the first day and how it connects to the last day matters. We are precise, cognizant that the language of learning permeating our classrooms affects thinking.

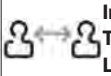
In concert with my classroom accounts, co-contributors to this volume, Danielle Lillge and Crystal VanKooten, spent time collaborating in English language arts classrooms and have created companion vignettes that will take us into additional environments that are balancing classroom practice with standards integration. All the teachers in this volume have generously invited us into their classrooms to experience teaching and learning moments that illustrate how the chaos of their classroom life is indeed deliberate, precise, and carefully designed. The teaching and learning practices described highlight the ways these teachers work to enact NCTE principles that affirm the value of the knowledge

As you read through the chapters in this volume, look for the following symbols to signal various themes and practices.

Common Core State Standards

Collaboration

Connections


Integrated Teaching and Learning

Honoring Diversity

and experience students bring to school, the role of equity in literacy learning, and—always—the learning needs of students while attending to the CCSS. Each of two teaching and learning vignettes within each chapter is preceded by a brief description of the context in which the teacher and his or her students are working and is followed by an explanation of the teacher's journey to developing pathways to enact these practices because, as we all know, exemplary moments in teaching are the product of many years of studying classroom practice, discussing ideas with colleagues, and reflecting on teaching and learning. Charts following the vignettes highlight key teaching and learning practices and connect them with specific CCSS and with NCTE research-based principles, and finally, the "Frames That Build" sections offer exercises to help you think about how the teaching and learning practices highlighted in the vignettes can connect to your local teaching context.

Connections

Section III focuses exclusively on the building frame. There, you will find specific resources for building your instruction with the CCSS and for working with colleagues to observe patterns in the CCSS document compared to previous local and state standards.

It is our hope that these teaching and learning vignettes and the corresponding materials will serve as a reflection of the language of learning that already fills your classrooms, and that they will demonstrate a framework that allows thinking about not just *what* we do, but *why* we do it. We hope they will remind us that in the layers of local, state, and national values, the greatest intentionality comes from the classroom teacher who enters the complexity and emerges with a process that honors the learning in our classrooms. We invite you to step into these classrooms, reflect on them, and use their successes and challenges to further your own thinking about what bridges you can build between the CCSS and your own instruction.

Teaching and Learning Practices for Reading: Sarah's Classroom

I remember noticing the time that spring afternoon during my second year of teaching. My ninth graders and I had spent the last forty-five minutes going question for question, point for point, and I had a sinking feeling as I realized this would be our last discussion of Maya Angelou: the posturing of points. Did it really matter if they could recall every *what* I put in front of them? I thought I had been using themes, such as power, to frame this unit, but actually, I was still teaching the details of a book, not offering for my readers the kind of authentic experience we all crave. I was teaching them how to read for school, not for life, and thus, I couldn't blame them for how I'd inadvertently set up this horrible forty-five minutes of point-mongering.

I vowed to rethink what it meant to be an authentic reader, to reread Nancie Atwell and Louise Rosenblatt with the eyes of experience wide open. I paid attention to my own reading habits, especially as I read challenging texts and worked to construct meaning with them. I quickly realized that texts cannot operate in isolation the way I was teaching them. I had been organizing my teaching around themes, but

I hadn't really been using them to prepare students to read for complexity because I still was teaching the *what* of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* without the kind of context and texture that liberates students to read complex texts for layers of meaning.

The shift in how I created reading experiences has its roots in that day. To realize that change, two things had to happen: (1) I needed a shift in thinking and (2) I needed a deliberate and honest implementation of that new paradigm. That day serves as a poignant reminder that there are all kinds of "moves" in our classrooms that quickly, silently, powerfully subvert our best intentions. In this case, using a highly objective test spoke more loudly about what I valued in a reading experience than any mention of our theme had up to that point.

So, my inquiry began in understanding *how* to craft a reading experience that scaffolded us to greater understanding and meaning-making. As I realized that teaching a theme and thematic teaching were distinctly different instructional endeavors, it also occurred to me that teaching thematically meant I had to design reading experiences in such a way that texts would talk to each other. I started by gathering a variety of texts that extended one main text in similar ways. *Romeo and Juliet* was preceded by excerpts of marriage stories from *Marry Me* as well as selected Shakespearean sonnets. Instead of watching a film version of the play, we juxtaposed excerpts of three different versions, working to establish how nuanced interpretations offered texture to our interaction with *Romeo and Juliet*.

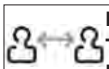
Connections
Sarah's use of a thematic approach is one way to organize units. See Section III for more ideas about how to plan with this in mind.

Soon, even this approach gave way to more intentionality in text selection and, thus, more complexity. Later, I recognized that my centerpiece text was never as powerful without the benefit of other texts to provide context. *The Stranger* wasn't as powerful without excerpts of *Sophie's World*, Charlie Chaplin, or punk rock music to amplify it. Our investigation of it wasn't complete without juxtaposing Camus to Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* to offer contrast, to spark questions, to prompt curious distinctions. Before long, we were hearkening back to Salinger, Peter Kuper's graphic novel of *The Metamorphosis*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Even though we moved on to a juxtaposition of Flannery O'Connor and Mary Shelley, our discussion of good and evil was fueled by the likes of Mersault and the other authors, characters, and ideas that permeated our course. I had not only learned to teach thematically, but I had also learned how to design a recursiveness in text selection that mirrored and honored the kind of recursiveness we practiced as writers, thinkers, viewers, and readers.

Sarah's Journey: Pathways to Enact These Practices

A consistent feature in the CCSS, one that extends across all grades, asks students to stop seeing texts as isolated pieces of work and to compare them to other texts. As the texts become more complex and students become more savvy, the reading goes

beyond even compare/contrast and moves toward juxtaposing texts to reveal their layers and nuances. Certainly, one component of helping students read complex texts resides in the strategic instructional moves that guide and scaffold students while they are in the process of reading the texts. Yet, as we interpret the CCSS, it's equally important to consider how we select texts and organize reading in a way that invites scaffolding and establishes layered reading of complex texts.



Integrated Teaching and Learning

Sarah's approach to texts resists having students read one text in isolation, but instead seeks to layer different types of texts—print, canonical, multimedia, and popular culture texts—on top of one another.

Reading, especially complex reading, doesn't occur in isolation. In imagining a reading experience that is scaffolded by design, that resists reading in isolation, and welcomes a situation in which texts "talk" to each other, I've used a concept (see Table 2.1) to design instruction that deliberately layers the reading of texts by way of conceptual reading circles (unlike student reading groups, these "circles" demonstrate how we can layer the reading of classroom texts). Just as I started with *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Stranger*, many teachers may begin by choosing their major or *fulcrum* text, the selection that is the centerpiece of any unit of study. The fulcrum text is one that offers distinct layers of meaning and complexity for the reader. It may be of considerable length, it may use nonlinear narrative structure, it may be considered a "classic." This is the fulcrum text because it is the most complex and the work that comes before and after helps to tease out and maneuver its complexities. Students work toward reading independence with these texts.

Context texts	**Fulcrum texts**	**Texture texts**
These accessible "anchor" texts create a reservoir of prior knowledge that gives context to the complexity of further reading.	*These texts are often the traditional whole-class text or they take the place of that whole-class text.*	*While these texts often seem to be shorter, it also is effective to juxtapose two major texts to create reading texture.*
Film film excerpts informative pieces news/magazine articles blog radio show podcast short story poetry drama young adult literature brief fiction brief nonfiction graphic novel	book-length fiction book-length nonfiction short story or stories drama poem or series of poems film student selected text whole-class text	film film excerpts informative pieces news/magazine articles blog radio show podcast short story poetry drama young adult literature brief fiction brief nonfiction graphic novel

TABLE 2.1: Sample Texts for Reading Complexity Circles

Crucial at this point is letting go of the idea that our focus is teaching the content of the text rather than skills of reading and thinking. In other words, I don't teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I teach "courage," and *To Kill a Mockingbird* is but one of the texts used to explore the idea of courage. Therefore, organizing a reading experience around an idea versus a book title becomes central to including both the *context* and *texture* texts that expand the potential of the reading experience. A *context* text(s) anchors the reading experience by generating prior knowledge while connecting to student interests, motivations, and questions. It is accessible and it creates motivation. It may have teenage protagonists or be particularly brief. It deals with the theme or essential question in succinct or overt ways. It may set up vocabulary or scenarios crucial to the other texts; it anchors thinking.

The *texture* texts, then, are read either in conjunction with the fulcrum text or after it. *Texture* texts do just that: add texture to reading and thinking through their juxtaposition. They may be read both simultaneously and/or after other texts. These texts may contradict another work, may focus in on one aspect of another work, or may illuminate another work in some fashion. These texts are often brief because they may be complex, technical, or appropriate for shared reading. As readers must tease out the implicit nuances of these texts, the opening for use of ongoing and specific textual evidence emerges as part of the classroom discourse. Perhaps most importantly, the fulcrum text from one unit then informs the reading and learning of the next unit. In a curriculum that is ongoing and progressive, the fulcrum text in one unit becomes part of the continuing discourse of the class and, thus, becomes part of the context for upcoming units. Just as *The Stranger* went from a fulcrum text in one unit to providing context for Flannery O'Connor in the next, this model creates a recursiveness in which even the units are no longer in isolation of each other.

Certainly, teachers come to this work of implementing reading standards with text complexity from various circumstances. Few teachers are able to imagine and implement without navigating many levels of school bureaucracy. Regardless of one's teaching situation, creating these kinds of reading experiences is possible.

In looking at Table 2.1, it's crucial to note that text types can quickly move from one column to another. Further, these columns are representative of different types of texts, rather than offering a complete list. In implementing reading complexity circles, it's less important to choose the "right" kind of text for each circle and far more vital to use the selected texts with intentionality. In other words, *how* the texts are used to scaffold the reading experience takes precedence over *which* texts are chosen. The same text could work in each of the three circles. For instance, a short story could be the fulcrum text of a unit, knowing that its purpose there is to spend extended time with the short story, teasing out its many layers. In another scenario, the same short story could be juxtaposed with a book-

Common Core State Standards

Students in Sarah's classroom are given opportunities to read a range of texts—literary and informative—including those from various modes and sources. They read texts of increasing complexity at both their independent and instructional levels. Sarah believes this fosters an environment in which learners can take intellectual risks.

length nonfiction text and serve to provide texture or perspective to the nonfiction. In yet another scenario, the short story could create context for the fulcrum text, a drama. Intentionality and execution of the design depends on using all three circles at any given juncture of a course. Simply envisioning a single text in three ways (the short story as representative of all three) underestimates the power and recursiveness of designing with text complexity in mind.

For example, I recently taught a course in which *The Odyssey* was one of the major texts. I began planning by determining which facets of the content I wanted students to learn. The power of allusion? The importance of metaphor? The theme of journey? I also thought about the skills that students should emerge from this unit with. The ability to read closely? The ability to analyze the literature? The ability to write convincingly about the text? Through this exploration, the essential question emerged: How do physical journeys fuel personal insights? With the question posed and the skills to focus on elevated, the content needed to fuel our inquiry. The fulcrum text, *The Odyssey*, became the text we needed to unpack the most. To frame that text, I chose *Star Wars* and some excerpts from Joseph Campbell as context texts. The context texts allowed us to practice our skills and create a reservoir of language and ideas that enabled readers more access to *The Odyssey.* Then, as we read our fulcrum text, we added the potential for nuanced readings by juxtaposing *The Odyssey* with an NPR piece on veterans and violence along with excerpts from the *Frontline* episode "A Soldier's Heart." By making sure that students saw how these texts weren't isolated, but how knowing one lends depth to another, they were far more prepared to deal with the text complexity before them. Layering instructional design in this way also created ongoing writing and speaking experiences.

As we consider enacting these practices, we each have the reality of our book closets to go to. On opening those doors, some may see an abundance of options, while others may feel constrained by what they see. Regardless of your reality, there is a place to begin. Certainly my journey has been a progressive one. Throughout my teaching experiences, I have found myself in a variety of scenarios that range from working within a fixed curriculum, to reorganizing reading experiences in a flexible curriculum, to imagining and implementing a department set of course offerings where all the classes are organized around themes. Taking the resources you have and organizing them using reading complexity circles (see Figure 2.1) can help you authorize *your* readers.

Working within a Fixed Curriculum

As I started teaching, the curriculum already established by the departments was largely fixed with prescribed readings and sometimes prescribed materials. In cases like this, the process of crafting a reading experience begins with text placement. Which texts are already next to each other in the curriculum? Do they have anything

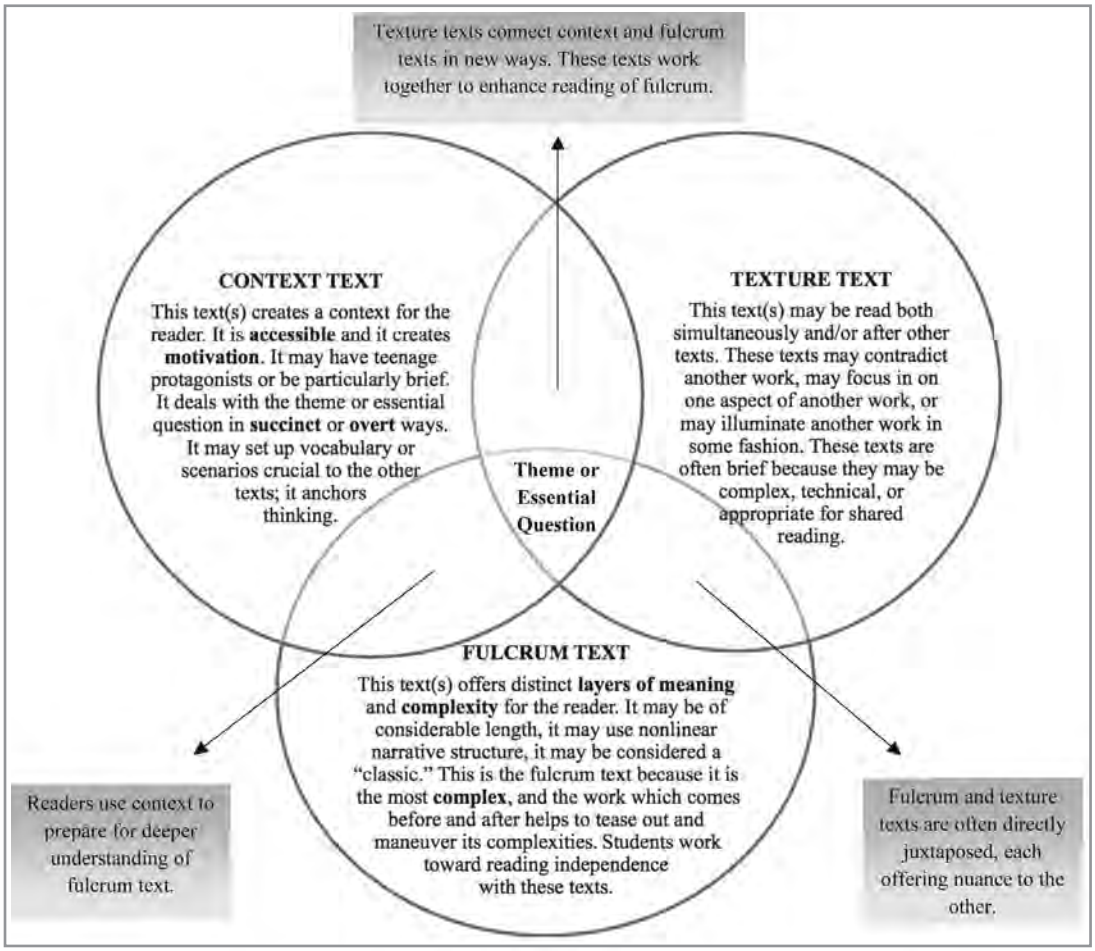


FIGURE 2.1: Reading complexity circles.

to say to each other? Can a few texts that are in close proximity to each other be grouped around a theme or essential question? Which short, accessible texts could I bring into the classroom to provide a context? How will the language of the theme serve as "reading Velcro" for each subsequent text? Often, in a fixed curriculum, the fulcrum text was canonical. Yet even with a traditional text at the center of unit design, I could still consider which texts to bring in from other units. I could also scour classrooms for unused resources that could add texture to the reading, discussion, and analysis of that major text. If you are using a textbook, ask if the selections can be reorganized around a theme or question. Imagine the selections becoming context or texture texts for other selections. Regardless of how tight the constraints on your

curriculum may be, organizing study around themes, bringing in short anchor pieces for context, and getting the texts you have out of isolation and into conversation with each other will advance a more authentic reading experience.

Collaboration

As Sarah's experience indicates, one place to meaningfully collaborate with colleagues is through the development of a flexible, textured reading curriculum.

Working with a Flexible Curriculum

Several years into my career, as I acquired some experience and demonstrated competence in the classroom, the potential for a more flexible curriculum emerged. I volunteered for curriculum committees and found that I could still meet the local standards while reconfiguring *how* I went about organizing our learning. This flexibility enabled me to collaborate with other teachers in an effort to shift texts from one course or unit to another. In this case, there was the potential to rewrite or write in units of study where context, fulcrum, and texture texts align. In this case, it was helpful for me to reimagine the fulcrum text. Did it have to be the same whole-class novel whose place in the curriculum has seemed cemented? What if the text was nonfiction? What if it was poetry instead of a novel? What if it was contemporary instead of classic, or classic instead of contemporary? What if it was a literature circle or individual choice instead of whole class? In this case, reimagining the role of that major text as a fulcrum invites companionship with other texts where it may have been shadowed before. I also started to look outside of my closet and the department for resources. Could your library, school or public, find enough copies of a graphic novel to use as a texture text? Is there a young adult literature selection in a neighboring grade level that could create a context? Is there another department that uses full-length nonfiction texts that could be juxtaposed with the fulcrum text?

When You Can Create the Curriculum

Most recently, as several influences aligned, my department and I had the opportunity to imagine and create a curriculum with the support of resources and funding. In this unique situation, the possibility of organizing not only units but entire courses around reading circles offered the potential for ongoing scaffolding from text to text, unit to unit, and course to course. As Figure 2.1 shows, reading circles bring multiple texts together.

Beyond Design: Meeting Readers Where They Are

I think that many teachers have long taught to a set of standards. It's that intersection of content and skill all learners must have to be equipped as a member of a highly literate and quickly changing society. While teachers just entering the profession may draw from a defined set of national standards such as the CCSS to help them

find focus and purpose in their work, those teachers who have already established an "internal compass" of sorts come to this work of integration with a unique challenge. While established teachers may quickly understand the standards, I have found, through my own efforts and by working with other teachers, it's taxing to determine how the language and implications of the standards make it into our day-to-day work.

Wielding a blueprint of instructional design means we've created the capacity for students to construct their own learning; meeting them in that process comes next. Teaching readers to be thinkers means we must engage with our students as they work to comprehend what they read, to use explicit evidence to support their readings, to pay close attention to word meanings, and to integrate the ideas of several texts to support their own response. The language of the reading standards sends us a clear message: Students must be able to read carefully and closely, using precise evidence to support analysis. This means that we will help students to use their personal connections and responses to texts as entry points, knowing this practice creates access to a text. It also means that as we guide students to reading as a generative process, the way they exit a text may be precipitated on how they entered it, but they will emerge from the reading having attended to precise language and having interacted with its nuances. I often think of the kinds of questions that surround our work in the classroom as either **entry questions** or **exit questions**. In other words, we will ask the kinds of questions that give our students *entrance* into a text: the question that activates schema, that connects to what they know, that piques a personal interest. Once they're "in" we need to ask the kinds of questions that help them *exit* the text with a nuanced, layered reading. When we center our prismed readings on the precise language of the text, we're helping students to explore *how* or *why*.

Common Core State Standards

The CCSS use the language of Anchor Standards (the standards that apply to 6–12) and grade band specific standards, which are delineated into 1a, 1b, and so forth. See Figure 1.1 for further clarification.

So often, when working with standards, we subscribe to the subtext that if we teach all of the discrete parts (the grade band standards and even the further delineated interpretation of those, which often happens at the local level) then students will surely achieve the standard. However, it seems much more likely that if we teach to the anchor standard, and use the language of the grade band standards to inform our feedback and to guide our scaffolding, the purpose and focus of learning remains clear and steady. Otherwise, we operate with a compass that relies on our learners to make the connections and determine the learning purpose by virtue of being the only ones who have "done all of the grade band assignments." It becomes part of our charge to resist a linear approach that compartmentalizes assignments corresponding to grade band standards and offer, instead, a recursive approach that moves in and out of standard and skill, recognizing that we aim to layer them for more authentic purposes rather than stack one task on top of another, hoping it won't all topple over.

One way in which I aim to maintain a larger focus is through naming and enacting a process of reading, of thinking. In the beginning days of class, students talk not about what it means to be a good student, but what it means to be a good learner. As concepts of curiosity, playfulness, divergence, and perseverance enter their vocabulary, the focus of classroom work becomes not just acquiring a content-knowledge base or wielding a set of skills, but also on acquiring the dispositions that make someone an autonomous, lifelong learner.

At the end of every quarter, my students use a taxonomy of these dispositions to trace their progress as learners. Divided into six sections—reader, writer, viewer, communicator, thinker, and habits of mind—this taxonomy then fans out into two more layers. The next layer highlights words that would describe each section followed by a layer that describes the actions embodied by the learner. For example, a reader is also described as "active," "critical," and "voracious." Some of the actions are "recognizing and building on patterns" or "challenging texts and conventional readings." Students gauge their progress by highlighting just a couple of descriptors or actions they demonstrate. Through reflection and documentation, they connect the descriptions to their work and then choose a couple of new descriptors to pursue in the next quarter. This reflective invitation to the students serves as an outward reflection of the implicit process and about what inspires and guides my commitment to students: the belief in their ability to become autonomous, lifelong learners.

As you prepare to meet the teachers of Oak Park in this companion vignette, you'll certainly see this same commitment to student learning reflected in their work. As Danielle Lillge takes you into their classrooms, you'll be privy to how an entire team is establishing a culture of literacy that parallels the deepening reflections and practices of its teachers.

Meet the English Language Arts Team, Oak Park High School

The CCSS guide the work of a team of Oak Park High School ELA teachers including Peter Haun, Carissa Peterson, Ann Rzepka, and Steven Snead, with the help of Linda Denstaedt, who are committed to changing their instruction with the goal of improving student learning. Understanding how and why this team of teachers has come together around the CCSS involves first considering the factors influencing their work.

Having transitioned from a white, Jewish, middle-class community to an urban fringe, black, working- and middle-class community over the past two decades, Oak Park's population shift is further complicated by the effects of economic downturn as families have left the city in search of jobs. Once a high school of 1,800 students, today the high school's 800 students arrive at school each day not only from local Oak Park neighborhoods but also through open-enrollment from nearby Detroit. The loss of student enrollment is also part of a larger narrative about how the school district's $10 million deficit affects the quality of education. One huge indicator of these effects came when only 5 percent of Oak Park High School students demonstrated proficiency on state tests; consequently, Oak Park was labeled a high school in need of improvement.

Further complicating teachers' realities, Oak Park High School is the recent recipient of a large federal Shared Instrumentation Grant (SIG) aimed at funding instructional change that will improve students' performance, achievement, and ultimately test performance. SIG's immediate impact was on the administrative and staff population. This year, under the guidance of a new administrative team, approximately half of the high school's staff members are new to the building; many teachers, including Carissa and Ann, arrived after having taught in the district's middle-level buildings for years. The newly combined Oak Park faculty is charged with improving student performance. Without SIG the school district's deficit would likely prevent the Oak Park ELA team teachers from focusing on essential and complex instructional change. But, SIG also raises the stakes more than ever before; if the Oak Park ELA team members and their colleagues' efforts do not improve student performance, then the school runs the real risk of closure.

At this unique moment in their school's history, the Oak Park ELA team teachers have found in the CCSS a rationale to reshape their instruction and curricula, an impetus to think much more deeply and purposefully about their professional work, and a challenge they are only beginning to tackle with urgency. The CCSS focus on developing students as readers, writers, and thinkers across disciplines is something that has encouraged ELA team members to see their work as culture shifting and shaping. Just as the larger Oak Park community continues to shift, the team teachers recognize the need to help redefine the school culture in support of literacy learning that raises expectations for what students are capable of achieving.

This commitment to redefine school culture that will benefit student learning comes with associated challenges—for students and teachers. One such challenge emerges from generational, socioeconomic, cultural, and racial factors that form disconnects between students and teachers. As one of two African American male teachers in the school, Steven, who also taught in a model Detroit school, notes, "Most of our students come to school and there's no one here like them." Other challenges result from a school culture that has most recently focused on the maintenance of the status quo. As special education and content area teachers collaborate, they

face the difficulties of redefined professional roles and disparate training in team-teaching and literacy-based instruction. Additionally, students were not expected to read at home until this year, Carissa explains. And in Ann's sixteenth year of teaching at both the middle school and high school levels, this is the first year that her students have had access to books that they are able to take home from school to read. She shares her colleagues' concerns about changing the school culture from one where "students aren't expected to even play school" to one where students meet "high expectations" because they can with the right instructional support. These are but a few of the challenges the Oak Park ELA team face as they endeavor to shift their practice in support of literacy learning.

Teaching and Learning Practices for Reading in the Oak Park Team's Classrooms

As part of their effort to establish a school culture of literacy, the Oak Park teachers focus their reading instruction on developing students' ability to think about texts more deeply. By articulating and substantiating claims, for example, the learning tasks team teachers ask students to enact are congruent with the CCSS. All four teachers are working with students to understand how to meet such expectations by summarizing main ideas in reading selections, drawing on textual support for claims about the events and elements in the text, and articulating orally and in writing their interpretations of the textual evidence in support of their claims about the reading. However, the fluidity between reading, talking about reading, and writing about reading make extrapolating reading practices from other ELA threads such as speaking and listening difficult in the interactive, discourse-oriented classrooms Oak Park team teachers have established. If you were to walk into the Oak Park ELA team teachers' classrooms, you would find teachers modeling for students the moves, thinking, and talk that critical readers employ within the interactive, discourse-oriented approach they all share. Over time, team members have come to identify the following four elements you will see at play in the classroom snapshots below as central to how they define their interactive, discourse-oriented classrooms: shared habits of mind, skills, and strategies; authentic engagement in classroom talk; common language; and regular instructional adjustments based on student feedback data.

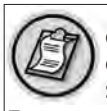
Integrated Teaching and Learning

Most basically, the Oak Park team defines an interactive, discourse-oriented approach as one that views learning as a result of working with, listening to, and contributing to conversations with others through various ELA threads. For these teachers, discourse is the line through which reading, writing, speaking, listening, and therefore learning grow.

Carissa is modeling for her twelfth-grade students how she records her thinking about reading in her Reader's/Writer's Notebook as part of Oak Park's shared habits. Students *and* teachers keep notebooks where they record their thinking. "Let me

show you how I set this up in my notebook," she explains before showing students explicitly how she makes decisions about what to record. Beyond just showing, Carissa expects her students to try on the process she models as "good critical readers"; she believes they are capable contributors to the collective learning in a class where half of the class population includes special education students. Her interactions with students acknowledge their thinking as a valuable asset to the shared learning through discussion: "Good point. I didn't even include this one, Marcus," she says, "Thank you." Her encouragement of student responses also opens space for her to challenge students' thinking: "I have a question for you. How does that quote about the sit-ups support what we said above?"

Seated in small tripods of desks next to large picture windows with walls displaying student work, Peter's eleventh-grade students discuss their reading of *Night*. His students write entries in their Reader's/Writer's Notebooks in preparation for class discussion of characterization in the book. They work quietly but collaboratively in short conversations with others at their tripod about how their interpretations and connections link to one another while Peter canvasses the room writing observations on his clipboard and listening in on students' conversations. Students' purposeful engagement in classroom talk reflects Oak Park team members' efforts to help students use talk as a way of making meaning of texts. Teachers' help, though, comes not only from direct interaction with students but also from the way that they plan for and facilitate conversation in their classrooms. In the tripod discussions, Peter's students clarify tasks for one another, provide each other with what he calls the "extra boost" to push their thinking further, and enact what strong readers do as they read. Peter's efforts to establish a classroom community where discussion about reading is central results in a classroom dynamic where, he describes, students "get more help from each other than I could possibly" offer.



Common Core State Standards

Team members' efforts build on the CCSS shift toward meaning-making as central to reading.

Across the snow-covered courtyard Steven's tenth-grade students review story elements related to their reading of *The Color Purple*. He encourages students to substantiate the claims they are making about particular characters. At one point he says to Richard, "I like the claim you made. Celie does not know how to stand up for herself. We just need to find the evidence for that." And when another student offers textual evidence by reading from a particular page, Steven presses her to explain the connection between the evidence and the claim: "How does that confirm the claim on the board about Celie?" At the same time, Steven sees value in helping his students understand why this discussion of claims, evidence, and interpretation matters beyond the immediacy of his classroom. He explains how the thinking moves students are making connect with the thinking employers are going to expect of the

Common Core State Standards

Team members' focus on claims, evidence, and interpretation emerges directly from the high school reading standards.

students in the future. Oak Park teachers have committed to a common language as part of their interactive, discourse-oriented approach. All team members are talking with students throughout the building about claims, evidence, and interpretation.

Integrated Teaching and Learning

Team teachers' charts serve as reminders for students of class discussions and the moves or decisions that strong readers, writers, and thinkers enact.

Visitors entering Ann's twelfth-grade English classroom down the hall find charts lining the walls, student desks facing one another, and an inviting area rug at the center of the space. The class is engaged in a discussion of *The Lovely Bones*, and Ann draws their attention to one chart in the center of a blackboard, which says, "Readers learn about characters through the problems they face. Readers use this knowledge to predict what will happen in the end of the novel." As they continue, Ann prompts students to return to the sticky notes they use to record their thinking while reading prior to class discussion. "Yes," she encourages, "so find the exact sentences in your books" that warrant the claims and interpretations drawn about the characters' problems. When Ann invites students to record their interpretations with textual support, she grabs a clipboard from her desk and travels around the room; she checks in with students for brief conferences about the sticky notes they prepared for class before bringing the class back together for a discussion of what they have found.

Connections

In conversations such as Ann's, Oak Park team members are formatively assessing students' ability to engage with the text as they read using data they collect during each lesson both in student work and from classroom talk. Ann speaks about being able to adjust her instruction the following day as necessarily dependent on what she finds. For other ideas about how you might employ formative assessments, see Section III.

The Oak Park Team's Journey: Pathways to Enact These Practices

Past Practice

The use of an interactive, discourse-oriented workshop approach to instruction and learning is new for Oak Park students and most ELA teachers alike. In the past, ELA teachers worked from a common single textbook where they and their students plodded from reading selection to selection, and students had become accustomed to what Carissa describes as "answering question after question" in response. Peter humbly recognizes his reliance on the textbook and associated handouts drew heavily on his "own education." By and large Oak Park students were asked to recount information, follow procedures, and, as Ann describes, "play school."

Shifting Practice

The omnipresent threat of school closure has no doubt motivated team members' efforts to change instruction; yet at the same time, these teachers are deeply committed to providing their students with opportunities for learning that will benefit them beyond their days at Oak Park High School and beyond their experiences

with one high-stakes test. In other words, SIG may have prompted the teachers' immediate motivation to shift practice, but their commitment to their students stokes the fire that maintains their energy in the face of this challenging and uncharted journey.

Even so, team members' commitment alone would not sustain their efforts without access to and opportunity to collaboratively learn about instructional practices that best support their students' learning. The team members attribute much of their success in establishing a framework that grounds their instructional conversations and offers a map for their planning around the CCSS to the ongoing, sustained support of literacy leader Linda Denstaedt. Drawing on more than thirty years of classroom teaching, literacy leadership, authorship, and her role as co-director of the local Oakland National Writing Project site, Linda works with the team and other Oak Park teachers regularly in varied capacities. She is eager to attribute the team members' progress to their commitment to shifting and reflecting on their practice. But, as they describe the evolution of their work together where some team members questioned Linda's role early on in the year as "yet another" outsider keen on telling them what to do, the team members now eagerly talk about a synergetic working relationship with Linda. They note that Linda values their expertise and comes to conversations as a colleague; team members explain that her feedback and questions guide their decision making and shape a vision for what is possible at Oak Park High School for students and teachers alike. They believe in what they are creating together and they value Linda's role in helping them to achieve this shared vision.

Collaboration

The Oak Park team collaborates with the help of Linda. Many schools and districts have literacy coaches who work with groups of teachers. In Appendix A, you will find a list of resources about these types of collaborations.

Common Core State Standards

By drawing much of their common language for describing skills and strategies directly from the CCSS, Oak Park teachers are beginning to see the benefits for students. Peter teaches a resource class that includes students who have different ELA teachers. He talks readily about how these students are able to help one another and talk about what they are doing in different classes, even across grade levels, because they share the same language for naming the work they are engaged in. For Peter, the common language affords him opportunity to support students' learning across courses in ways he might not otherwise be able to.

In collaborative work with Linda and in regular guiding consultation with the CCSS, one key aspect of the team's shifting practice is their adoption of a discourse-oriented, interactive workshop approach to their classroom instruction. But just what this approach will grow to mean is something that the teachers are identifying and considering further as they enact units of study around this instructional model. At this point team members define a discourse-oriented, interactive workshop as one that contains the following elements:

- *Shared habits of mind, skills, and strategies across ELA threads*—Linda talks about developing students' "ways and tools for adopting an academic identity and/or creating metacognition and agency." Among these CCSS informed habits, skills, and strategies are those highlighted in the vignette snapshots in this chapter

around summarization, crafting claims, supporting claims with textual evidence, and warranting claims with logical explanations.

- *Authentic engagement in classroom talk*—Team teachers value talk, or discourse, as a critical vehicle for student learning. When students are asked to engage authentically in classroom discourse—whether in writing or speaking—with contributions that evidence their thinking and openness to others' thinking, the Oak Park ELA team teachers have found students' understanding and ability to extend their thinking far surpass the teachers' past experiences of classroom interaction.
- *Common language*—But it's not just about random talking for Oak Park ELA team teachers; rather, their focus on the centrality of language serves two specific purposes. First, team teachers' shared language in their conversation about practice with one another enables them to label and talk concretely about the teaching practices they are enacting. The language they share to describe the pedagogical moves they make helps them translate their instruction into student actions. It is therefore not uncommon to hear team teachers explain to their classes, "Today during your independent reading, I want you to do what I just modeled for you." Second, teachers use a common language with students to name explicitly and make visible the strategies and essential content that supports critical thinking. They use a common language for identifying and talking about the strategies and skills students are expected to use, or enact, in making meaning of the texts students read and discuss with others. Team teachers share this language as a part of building a culture with shared ways of talking about the work students and teachers are equally engaged in.
- *Regular instructional adjustments based on student feedback data*—A shared language and shared practices also help the Oak Park ELA team teachers identify what to look for when assessing their students' ongoing learning through formative assessment practices. In discussions with students during their independent reading, Oak Park ELA team teachers use what Peter refers to as "quick sorts" to formatively assess students' enactments of the day's learning task or strategy. Through observation and brief conversations with students about their work, teachers collect data in their notebooks to chart the patterns they see in students' work. Using these data, they identify which students meet expectations and which students need further support to identify instructional interventions to consider before proceeding or in preparation for the next lesson.

Connections

Ann describes the close relationship she has come to see between class discussion, her conference discussions, and her formative assessment. "A lot of formative assessment is discussion. If I'm walking around [the classroom], I'm trying to notice and look for evidence to support" students' ability to enact the day's CCSS-informed learning task and thinking.

Honoring Diversity

Since the CCSS expect all students to enact the standards and leave up to teachers and schools how best to do so, Oak Park ELA team members create intervention space during independent reading time and through targeted mini-lessons using classroom data so they can better meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

Evolving Practice

This list of elements that shape the team's use of discourse-oriented, interactive classrooms is not exhaustive. Instead, the team members recognize that as they work to enact more CCSS informed units of study, they are learning to identify which elements of this approach are most critical to their students' learning and their work with one another. The process of learning with and from their students is ongoing.

It would also be unrealistic to assume that the shift to the CCSS and the interactive workshop, discourse-oriented approach has come easily for Oak Park. The approach presents a different way of thinking about how to engage students. Ann shares honestly, "When I started . . . , I was apprehensive. Sometimes I think we do things for classroom management; I always felt like if I didn't give kids something to do while they were reading, they wouldn't read." Giving up control of the classroom is a sentiment echoed by Ann's colleagues when they describe the leap of faith they took in agreeing to adopt a different instructional approach.

The shift in instruction and CCSS expectations for students has not been without struggle either. For students comfortable with questions and answers in response to textbook reading selections, a discourse-oriented approach to learning "pushed [students] beyond their comfort zone," Carissa describes. "The students have really been resistant. It's hard to make the shift and then see them resistant." But the team teachers also recognize that the instructional shift to an interactive classroom means that students are expected to more actively engage in the work of learning; they can no longer be passive consumers who arrive in classrooms to watch Oak Park teachers work.

Common Core State Standards

The Oak Park teachers believe the CCSS present an opportunity to raise the level of instruction and cognitive demands on students by focusing attention away from prior procedural display. They see the CCSS as offering them a way of making visible the complexities of teaching aimed at developing the independent readers, writers, and thinkers the CCSS document demands.

Realistically, the Oak Park ELA team teachers' collaborative efforts and journey illustrate the tension between frustration and celebration that accompanies difficult instructional change. In terms of celebration, their move beyond a culture that previously supported students' passive engagement has revealed early shifts in their students' attitudes and abilities. Ann describes, "What we're doing now is making kids think more, instead of handing them the study guide and having them give the right or wrong answers." The payoff for Carissa's students has come as they've seen the relevance in the coursework. She describes how one day after an ACT preparation meeting with the junior class, the students returned to class and shared with her, "This is the first time I've learned anything in English." They were able to see the connections between coursework and what they will be expected to perform on the test as well as future learning. Students' recent performance on the ACT predictor PLAN test posted the highest reading scores ever in the district. Ann has noticed similar ability and engagement

in her students' interactions in class: "I'm finding more now that my students are enjoying the book more. I had other teachers complain to me about students who are reading their books in the other teachers' classes."

Charting the Practices

As Danielle has observed and articulated in the Oak Park vignette, how we think and talk about learning speaks volumes about what we value. And we, the teachers in these vignettes, jointly value fostering students' lifelong learning. As Ann, Carissa, Peter, Steven, Linda, and I illuminate a range of pathways by which teachers plan with this goal in mind, we would be negligent if we represented planning as a recipe with the same steps for all. In fact, our individual planning processes vary widely across time, courses, and students. Figure 2.2 represents the range of pathways, or processes, by which teachers consider the integration of their teaching and the learning they plan for students.

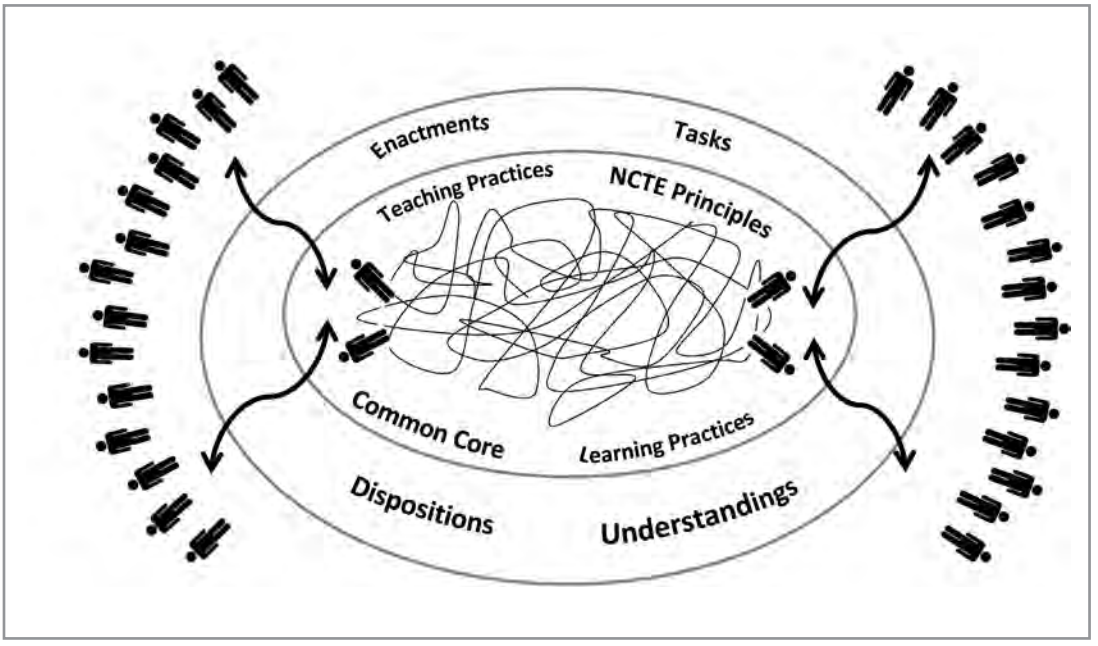


FIGURE 2.2: Pathways to planning and enacting instruction.

Through reflection or conversation, all the teachers in these vignettes speak to some form of wrestling with chaos in describing their thinking about planning. Figure 2.2 represents the chaos that we all navigate, but it also seeks to honor the fact that how we enter this chaos—the pathways by which we get there—varies. Some teachers enter through knowledge about their students, which are represented in the figure as encompassing and informing our thinking. Some teachers enter by thinking about the ultimate goals they have for their students; these are represented in the language of the outer circle including the dispositions, understandings, tasks, and enactments teachers expect students to demonstrate or develop. No matter the entrance, once in the middle we ultimately navigate the chaos that involves considering importantly the meeting place and relationship between these goals and the Common Core, NCTE principles, our teaching practices, and the learning practices we personally develop as well as those we foster in our students. My experiences as well as the vignette teachers' narratives affirm that we meet these considerations through various pathways differently over time.

Figure 2.2 visually represents the way we conceptualize these inextricably linked considerations that are at the heart of our decision making as teachers. We intentionally chose not to represent them as linear and one of our earliest versions of this figure actually included the words in the inner circle embedded within the chaos of the nest at the middle. Given the difficulty of actually reading this chaos, we chose in favor of readability; however, the original visual may more accurately represent why at times it is difficult for us to articulate the complexity of our thinking, acting, and ongoing learning about how to work with and meet the needs of diverse learners. Still, we believe it is possible and quite critical that we work to identify our decision making as well as how we conceive of the elements that inform our decisions, especially as we remind ourselves and others that the CCSS do not dictate the path we choose.

We hope that you will keep Figure 2.2 in mind as you read the charts that follow and that you will find at the end of each vignette chapter. In these charts, we endeavor to represent how the instructional decisions that emerge out of the chaos are, as I mentioned at the start of this section, deliberate, precise, and careful. For ease of representation, these charts read more linearly than the processes they depict. But they include the elements of our decision making and acting out of the chaos and toward deliberate goals and outcomes. Therefore our movement toward the CCSS is informed by the NCTE principles about what makes for strong ELA instruction and learning. With these principles in mind, we enact teaching practices that invite students to enact learning practices that will enable them to meet CCSS. The relationship between teaching and learning practices is key.

Our teaching opens the space and makes explicit for students how they can learn to enact particular tasks and to ultimately take on particular dispositions toward lifelong learning.

Therefore, the following charts highlight some of the key NCTE principles about and teaching practices for reading instruction that the teachers in this chapter's vignettes enact, connecting these to specific Reading Anchor Standards in the CCSS document, and merging how teachers expect students to evidence their ability to enact the standards in their learning.

Common Core Anchor Reading Standards that intersect with these practices (CCSS, p. 35)

Key Ideas and Details
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

↓ How Sarah enacts the practice	← Teaching Practice →	How Oak Park teachers enact the practice ↓
→ Rotates between individual response, small-group processing and large-group discussion, creating multiple opportunities for students to engage through conversation and writing with multiple fulcrum, context, and texture texts. → Uses the framework of themes and essential questions, creating discourse that relies on varying perspectives.	Establish frames for productive classroom discourse that open opportunities for students to make meaning of texts through conversation with others (e.g., classmates, teacher, those outside of the classroom).	→ Orienting classroom instruction toward classroom discourse and discussion about a range of reading selections. → Employing grouping strategies to facilitate ongoing conversations about texts.
↓ How Sarah's students enact the practice	**← Learning Practice →**	**How Oak Park students enact the practice ↓**
→ Through careful observation, locating patterns, and drawing conclusions, students talk and write in response to texts, working to create nuanced readings.	Students engage regularly in sustained discussion in small and large groups about the texts they are reading and the relationship and connections between texts.	→ Discussing ideas and responses to texts with classmates in small groups and whole-class settings. → Listening and responding to classmates' ideas.

NCTE Principles Regarding Reading

Reading is a complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning with text.

See pages 120–121 for more on NCTE principles regarding reading instruction.

Common Core Anchor Reading Standards that intersect with these practices (p. 35)

Key Ideas and Details
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from a text.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Craft and Structure
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

↓ How Sarah enacts the practice	← Teaching Practice →	How Oak Park teachers enact the practice ↓
→ Using a combination of teacher and student choice, texts for students to read are based on how the text will support students' thinking about the texts and themes. → Focusing on varied readings with textual evidence, texts are used to grow students' proficiency as readers capable of making meaning of complex texts.	Create opportunities for students to read for pleasure and to think critically about how and why texts develop, convey ideas, and impact readers as well as how authors craft texts for specific audiences and purposes.	→ Using instructional tools (e.g., sticky notes and charts) to record thinking about reading. → Focusing on varied readings with textual evidence.
↓ How Sarah's students enact the practice	**← Learning Practice →**	**How Oak Park students enact the practice ↓**
→ Through relevance to student questions and motivations, learners work toward generating readings that demonstrate nuance, perspective, and a range of ideas.	Students read texts both for pleasure and to think critically about how and why texts develop ideas, convey ideas, impact readers, and reflect a range of author choices.	→ Identifying key ideas in a text. → Drawing on textual evidence to support claims about texts. → Analyzing how and why authors craft texts to develop ideas.

NCTE Principles Regarding Reading
Readers read for different purposes.
The writer's language and knowledge of the topic as well as skill in using written language influence the reader's ability to construct meaning.

See pages 120–121 for more on NCTE principles regarding reading instruction.

Frames That Build: Exercises to Interpret the CCSS

The following exercises may be used by individuals or teams of teachers who are interested in working through the standards. As you unpack the standards, the vignettes may provide a lens through which to view your own individualized implementation of the standards.

- *Reading the standards.* Read the reading standards, looking for the verbs. What is it that students should be able to do as they read? What patterns do you notice in these verbs? Do they coalesce into dispositions for thinking?
- *Looking at text exemplars and sample performance tasks.* Download Appendix B of the CCSS, Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks, and look at a few of the sample performance tasks (pp. 122–123). What do you notice about how the questions are written? What kinds of skills do the questions focus on? What about the questions resonates with the language of the standards?

Web 2.1

- *Weighing classroom decisions.* Considering your inquiry into the standards and corresponding exemplars, what implications to classroom practices emerge? Which skills would you elevate for the different texts you read? What language would make it into your assessment tools? How might a focus on concepts versus topics inform your instructional design?

Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, Grades 9–12

Sarah Brown Wessling—the 2010 National Teacher of the Year—and fellow high school teachers demonstrate how to address the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in grades 9–12 while staying true to what they—and you—know about effective, student-centered teaching. The book begins with an overview of key features of the CCSS, addressing some of the most common questions they raise. Section II moves into individual classrooms, offering snapshots of instruction, showing teachers collaborating and making careful decisions about what will work best for their students, and focusing on formative assessment. Drawing on such diverse texts as *Macbeth, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* speeches by Barack Obama, graphic novels, and *Star Wars,* this section also includes charts showing how the CCSS align with established NCTE principles of effective teaching.

Section III offers suggestions for professional development, both for individuals and for communities of practice. This section recognizes that effective change requires long-term planning as well as collaboration among colleagues, and it offers strategies and materials for planning units of study, articulating grade-level expectations, and mapping yearlong instruction. And throughout the book, icons point you to additional resources and opportunities for interacting with other teachers on a companion website.

"It is our hope that these teaching and learning vignettes and the corresponding materials will serve as a reflection of the language of learning that already fills your classrooms, and that they will demonstrate a framework that allows thinking about not just what *we do, but* why *we do it. We hope they will remind us that in the layers of local, state, and national values, the greatest intentionality comes from the classroom teacher who enters the complexity and emerges with a process that honors the learning in our classrooms. We invite you to step into these classrooms, reflect on them, and use their successes and challenges to further your own thinking about what bridges you can build between the CCSS and your own instruction."—Sarah Brown Wessling*

Sarah Brown Wessling, a twelve-year veteran of the high school English language arts classroom, teaches at Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa. She was the 2010 National Teacher of the Year.

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